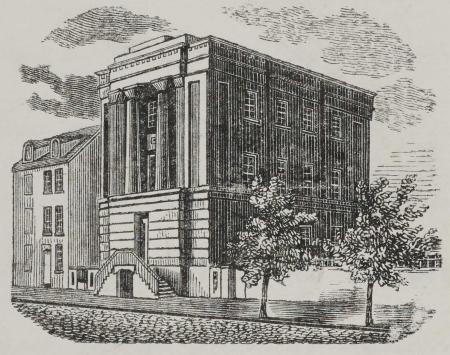
AN ESSAY ON

Curative agents & their action.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE



HOMŒOPATHIC MEDICAL COLLEGE

OF PENNSYLVANIA,

On the first day of January, Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-six.

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There is probably no point, within the whole range of medical science, which has been so much speculated upon, by the adherents of the various systems of Medicine and which is nevertheless so much in the dark as the question how drugs act upon the human frame, when they are administered as curative agents.

Truly the question is simple enough, because if it were clearly and undeniably answered, in other words, if we knew what peculiar inherent character of the drug acts upon this or the other appreciable attribute of the human frame, nothing would be easier, than to administer remedies which would act with mathematical precision.

Unfortunatly for humanity the question has as yet never been satisfactorily answered, indeed we must acknowledge that hardly anything is known, either of the exact characteristics and conditions of that part of man, upon which medecinal

agents act, or the peculiarities and intrinsic properties of drugs, as related to this unknown sphere.

Now it may seem strange that these evidently fundamental inquiries should never have been answered during the long period, which the history of Medecine encloses, and still we must not be surprised at it, when we consider, that in order to render intelligent explanations, the inorganic as well as organic world must be laid open before us to an allmost unlimited extent.

That relations do exist between a drug and its action upon the organism can not be denied, it being a very unphilosophic and unjust to ascribe these influences, which we see often exercised, where ever remedial agents are administered, to shear accident. To say for instance, that the vomiting, which is invariably produced by Ipecac is a quality independent of other perceptible properties of this drug, would be just as ridiculous as to assert, the vomiting to be an action, which

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has no connection whatever with the attributes and functional actions of the human organism, for in order to produce the vomit we must necessarily have two elements, first an organism to be acted upon, and secondly an agent to act on it and as soon as we change in the least, either one of the two, the result of their union will apparently also be changed.

Although, generally speaking, there is as yet but little acquaintance with the laws governing drug action, this is not on account of want of inquiry on the part of those engaged in the profession, for the history of medicine tells us that in want or search of the true laws, various theories have from time to time been established, refuted and abandoned, until at last the question has almost been entirely disregarded as unworthy of further consideration, by the adherents of the so called "regular school".

In its infancy, Medicine was of course

anything but a Science, the art of healing being practiced exclusively by those who had or pretended to have in their care mainly the spiritual welfare of the people, the only medicinal agent therefore was the influence of a superstitious belief or fear etc. of the patients mind. That this influence proved efficacious in many cases can not be doubted, indeed it is probable that on the whole it furnished full as many advantages as some of the later agents, some of which are existing, even at the present date under the head of antiphlogistic treatment. The modus operandi of these forces however were most probably unknown, even to the initiated.

At a later period other means, such as the bathing in certain springs or rivers were connected with the spiritual agents, and this constituted of course an improvement upon the first plan, since it covered one of the first rules in the treatment of disease, namely that of

keeping the body free from impurities. We also encounter at this period rules for abstinence from certain kinds of food, as well as the seclusion of the sick from the society and intercourse of the healthy; these circumstances already point to actual observations made on the sick and to a division of diseases into contagious and non-contagious.

This peculiar and simple practice of medecine, which was first introduced by the Jews, was certainly a great achievement and a very promising beginning for our Science; it was founded on truths, which have stood the test of ages and serve even at the present time as primary means to excite salutary influences, either as remedial or prophylactic agents. Indeed with all the benefits which we derive from our remedies, we could accomplish but very little, were it not for the natural stimulous furnished by a proper condition of the patients mind.

However, these agents do not fall strictly under the head of drugs and I proceed therefore to the consideration of the latter.

The early experimenters, for such they were seem to have followed very peculiar rules or rather notions in the selection of their remedies; not knowing of course what a particular article was capable of performing, and still resolved to try their best, they followed a natural impulse which brought them to lay great stress on the outward appearance of drugs, also their shape, colour, taste, smell, and especially the place from whence they originated; in the case of a plant for instance it made all the difference in the world, wether it grew on a hill or in the valley, on dry or on wet ground, wether it was gathered in the morning or evening etc. etc. Nor were they so far off the mark, especially in the latter of their suppositions, for though even in our times there is generally but little said

and thought about these things, they are of a great weight and instrumental in furnishing many a clue to the real virtues of drugs and if we are as yet not able to make much use of the general history and properties of drugs, it is I believe only, because we are still groping our way in the dark.

Of the early attempts at healing, as might be expected, some were successful and others unsuccessful, some were sufficiently weak to be overcome by the "vis medicatrix" others cured the disease, while others again cut it short, by sacrificing the life of the patient, and it was no small matter to discriminate, what caused the cure or the fatality of the disease. In consequence of this inability to determine the true value of a remedy one drug after another was first raised to the honorable degree of "cure-all" to be shortly after thrown away for something better and more reliable; much in the same way as the various

patent-preparations of the present age.

Hippocrates, the father of medecine was the first to collect all the facts he could, arranging them at the same time into systematical order, and endeavouring at the same time to give the rationale of the art of healing. Ever since his time rational medecine has been the order of the day, the rational theories of Galen, Paracelsus, Stahl & Brown, etc. etc. have each in succession had this day of glory, but to but very little purpose; small benefits have been derived from the rational speculations of these men and their adherents, for while they had contributed immensely to the advancement of Anatomy, Physiology, Pathology, etc. etc. they all finally agreed that the action of drugs are threefold, first, mechanical, second, chemical, & third, in some peculiar inexpressible way, which no body could rightly explain, though it was supposed by some to be by an influence upon the nervous system, they also agreed that it was to

no purpose to look any further, but to pursue the old empiric routine, i. e. to do as others did before them, occasionally making a hit or miss-experiment for the benefit of the profession in general.

Samuel Hahnemann was the first Physician who was ever fortunate enough to demonstrate successfully what drug action really was, how it differs from mechanical and chemical action, and though, by saying, that the true action of drugs was dynamical and directed towards the vital force of the organism, he did not bring us much nearer to the exact rationale of drug-action, he still gave us the law, derived from & confirmed by observations, which governs the relation between drug action upon the healthy and the diseased organism; so that by the use of this law, which is expressed by the words "Similia Similibus Curantur" we are enabled to know exactly what special remedy will be

applicable in any case and what the consequences of that application must be.

Hahnemann has also furnished us with the manner in which the dynamik nature of a drug may be separated from its mechanical and chemical properties, by means of his peculiar manner of dilution or rather dynamisation.

Now as regards the mechanical action of a drug it is of course dependent on the physical forces, which it may exert by virtue of its form, weight, density, elasticity etc. etc. The socalled Cowache for instance is used as an anthelmintic because, being in the shape of very fine needles, which are harmless to the mucous membrane of the intestines, it destroys the worms by piercing them, but it is nevertheless of no use whatever in destroying the existing elmintic diathesis. Other mechanical agents act in a similar manner, merely by removing deleterious agents situated without the organism, but not by altering morbid

conditions within.

The same is the case with the chemical preparations for in order, that they may act chemically, they must follow the laws of chemistry and they can only do this by changing a certain equivalent of the organised structure, after which its influence as a remedial agent is spend. chemical agents act therefore only by changing organized structure into unorganized and it is a great question wether on this account they are not more deleterious than productive of good. The proper sphere of chemicals I consider to be the same as that of the mechanicals, namely on the surface of the organism, where we may use them to good advantage. If for instance, a person swallow some poison, it would be well to prevent (not counteract) its effect upon the organism, by giving a proper chemical antidote, which by chemically combining with the poison, will change it into a harmless compound; should however any part of the poison

been allready absorbed, it is obvious that no amount of the chemical antidote would ever counteract its effects.

We see thus, that the effects of both mechanical and chemical agents may be calculated, if we are acquainted with the exact conditions, which surround the organism; not so with the dynamical actions of drugs, which must needs be ascertained by careful experiments upon the healthy organism. This is natural, for when we were in search for the chemical properties of matter, we had to compare their actions and deduct from the experience gained thereby the laws, which govern them; so in medicinal relations, before we can the laws of drug action, we must have such actions observed and recorded and draw our inferences accordingly.

This has been done and the great law given to us by Hahnemann, the founder of homoeopathy and though it is a disputed point

with many as to the manner of explaining this law rationally, it is acknowledged by all impartial observers to be the law, which is confirmed by every days practice of the old and new school.

But if the efforts towards a general explanation of the law of cure have thus far failed, it has been a matter of more success, to trace out at least some of the relations, which exist between the natural historys and pathogenetic effects of various drugs, by comparing them each respectively. If for instance we compare the symptoms of Hepar with those of Sulphur & Calcarea, we must be struck with the parallelity of their pathogenetic and chemical relations. The same relation will be found existing between Kali, Iodium, and Kali hydriot. and so with many other bodies.

Again we may group all the metals in a general class and we will find considerable harmony in the time of aggravation of symptoms etc. etc.

Similar analogies will be found among drugs derived from the vegetable world, by comparing the natural orders to which they belong not only, but also by having reference to the clime and soil in which they grow.

These analogies will no doubt gradually become developed more and more and there is reason to hope, that they will finally be instrumental in explaining our great law — Similia Similibus curantur.